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ABSTRACT

Noting that perceived violence in society has been found to be positively and significantly related to television viewing and especially related to the viewing of highly violent television, a study examined the relationship between MTV (Music Television) viewing and perceived violence in society. Subjects, 116 seventh grade students and 107 eleventh grade students, recorded their daily exposure to television for one week and completed a questionnaire to measure exposure to films and books during the previous two months. All programs, films, and books were categorized as either high violence or mild violence types; MTV was categorized as a high violence type. Results suggest that concern about the high levels of violence in music videos may be exaggerated. For the seventh grade students, MTV viewing was negatively and significantly related to the viewing of high violence television and the reading of high violence books and positively related to the viewing of mild violence films. For the eleventh grade students, MTV viewing was negatively related to viewing high violence action/crime television programs and positively related to mild violence daytime soaps and mild violence books. (A table of statistics is appended.) (SRT)

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MEDIATED VIOLENCE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF MTV

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The rapid growth of MTV and its appeal to children and adolescents have triggered concern about its impact on viewers. Critics of MTV have argued that the high levels of violence in its music videos could produce harmful effects, especially in young impressionable viewers,[1] or could promote violence against women.[2] These arguments have gained support from four recent content analyses of MTV and music videos, each of which found high levels of violence and antisocial behavior in music videos.

After analyzing 139 music videos, Caplan concluded that rock videos "are dominated by violence" with "almost twice as many acts of violence in music videos than on commercial television."[3] A review of 62 MTV videos by Baxter et al. found at least one act of violence and/or crime in 53.2 percent of MTV's videos.[4] In 166 concept videos (where more that half of the time is devoted to story as opposed to musical performance), Sherman and Dominick found episodes of violence in 56.6 percent of the videos with an average of 2.86 aggressive acts per violent video.[5] Similarly, in their analysis of 77 concept videos, Brown and Campbell found that "over half of the behaviors coded were antisocial in nature."[6]

The implicit and sometimes explicit assumption of these content analyses is that their documentation of large amounts of violence in music videos is consequential because of its potential impact on viewers. To help justify their content analysis of music videos, Baxter et al. relied on De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach's[7] proposition that "exposure to mass media content indirectly affects behavior by shaping cultural norms" and

Gerbner and Gross's[8] research on television's cultivation of "perceptions of mistrust, apprehension, danger, and a 'mean world'."[9] Sherman and Dominick observed that one of their goals was to provide "baseline data for an audience study on the potential effects of these videos on viewers."[10] Brown and Campbell, citing the National Institute of Mental Health's[11] ten year review of television and behavior, argued that "television can serve as an important socialization agent for children and adolescents, in terms of aggressive behavior."[12]

Although recent studies grounded in the uses and gratifications perspective have examined adolescent motivations for viewing MTV[13] and the connotative meanings attached to music videos,[14] content analyses of MTV have not led to published studies demonstrating a positive relationship between MTV viewing and any harmful effect. Indeed, one recent university study of 500 junior high school students, reported in the popular press, found "no harmful effects on kids who watched MTV."[15]

One explanation for the lack of research showing harmful effects from MTV's high levels of violence might be the media context of this violence. When interpreting the significance of MTV content analyses, it is important to remember that the violence in music videos does not exist in a media vacuum. Violence is a standard ingredient in several other types of media. Televised action/crime programs, such as police and detective shows, and cartoons have documented high levels of violence.[16] For example, Greenberg, et al. found a three year average of 18.2 acts of physical aggression per hour during prime

time network action/crime programs and 25.9 per hour during network Saturday morning cartoons, compared to only 7.2 acts of physical aggression in situation comedies and 5.1 acts in family dramas.[17] Furthermore, other media contribute violent content: high levels of violence are certainly present in many types of motion pictures (horror, action/crime, and science fiction films) as well as in much popular fiction (horror, adventure, science-fiction, detective, and western novels). Given the violent nature of many types of television programs, motion pictures, and books, should the additional violence in music videos be of much concern?

Several mass communication scholars have argued that a particular type of media content, such as the violence in MTV, should not be studied in isolation but in the context of other media that provide similar kinds of content. Lippmann's "pictures in our heads" metaphor,[18] Schramm's stalagmite analogy,[19] and Becker's Mosaic Model of Communication[20] all suggest that the effects of mass media usually come, not from a single message or source of messages, but from regular exposure to certain images, ideas, or attitudes over a long period of time. If violence is available from many different sources, it is usually the combination of sources used by the individual, not any specific source, that will be most important in shaping attitudes and behaviors. Thus, we need to establish the relationship between MTV viewing and exposure to other sources of violent content in order to assess more precisely the impact of MTV's contribution to mediated violence.

At least three consistent patterns of relationships between exposure to MTV and other sources of mediated violence are possible. In their review of studies of correlations among exposures to various media, Martin, et al. identified two of these patterns: the orthogonal and the centripetal.[21] In an orthogonal pattern, there are few significant relationships among exposures to various media or types of media content. In this pattern, MTV viewing would be unrelated to exposure to other sources of mediated violence. In a centripetal pattern, there are many significant, positive relationships among sources with similar content. MTV viewing would be positively related to other sources high in mediated violence, but negatively related to sources low in mediated violence. A third possibility is an "inverse" pattern, in which MTV viewing would be significantly and negatively related to other sources high in mediated violence, but positively related to sources low in mediated violence. In this case, MTV would be the major source of mediated violence for its viewers because of their below average consumption of other sources of mediated violence.

Following the reasoning of Lippmann, Schramm, and Becker, MTV's contribution to the "effects" of mediated violence should be strongest if the centripetal pattern exists and weakest if the inverse pattern is the case. This is because the cumulative effects of violence from several sources should be greater than the effects from a single source such as MTV.

In this study, these assumptions were tested by examining the relationship between MTV viewing and perceived violence in

society, the tendency for an individual's perception of the level of violence in society to be consistent with the high levels of violence in television programming, rather than the actual levels of violence in society. Perceived violence in society has been found to be positively and significantly related to television viewing and even more strongly related to the viewing of television programs high in violent content.[22] If a centripetal pattern of relationships between MTV viewing and other sources of mediated violence is found, the relationship between MTV viewing and perceived violence in society should be positive, of at least moderate strength, and statistically significant. If an inverse pattern exists, this relationship should be weak and non-significant.

The absence of research on the relationship between MTV viewing and the viewing of other types of media with high levels of violence or its relationship to perceived violence in society, prompted this reanalysis of data gathered in a recent comprehensive study of adolescent mass media exposure.[23] The adolescent audience's substantial exposure to MTV makes their study of particular importance.[24] Three questions were addressed:

1. What is the pattern of relationships (orthogonal, centripetal, inverse) between MTV viewing and the viewing of other types of mediated violence?

2. How does this pattern of relationships differ for two distinct groups of young and potentially impressionable MTV viewers: seventh graders and high school juniors?[25]

3. For these two age groups, what is the relationship between

the respondents' MTV viewing and their perceived level of violence in society.

Method

The respondents were 116 seventh graders from social studies classes at a public school and 107 high school juniors: 59 from the study halls at a public school[26] and 48 from English classes at a university sponsored laboratory school[27]. Ninety-one percent of the initial sample completed useable surveys. All respondents were from the Waterloo/Cedar Falls, Iowa area.[28] One hundred and seventy-five respondents completed the survey instruments in late October, 1982 and 48 completed them in late January, 1983.

Under the guidance of trained personnel, the respondents recorded their daily exposure to television for one week and completed a questionnaire to measure exposure to motion pictures and books during the previous two months. Respondents completed the survey materials during the regular school day.

To improve reliability, respondents were asked to record their exposure to specific television programs, motion pictures, and books rather than estimating their average exposure (as when respondents are asked how often they watch television or a particular type of program on a scale ranging from "never" to "often"). As Hawkins and Pingree noted, estimates of average viewing "suffer from reliability problems especially for estimates of viewing different program types"; consequently, a "viewing diary should be more accurate."[29]

Eleven types of television programming were identified from

the television programs which appeared on any of the three local, commercial network affiliates during the survey week, as well as any additional television programs recorded by the respondents. In addition to MTV, there were two high violence types (action/crime and cartoons) and eight mild violence types (non-serial drama, daytime soaps, prime time soaps, situation comedy, sports, game shows, movies and news). Exposure to each type equalled the sum of the half hours recorded by a respondent for that content category during the survey week.

All motion pictures shown at theaters and drive-ins in the survey area during the two months prior to the survey week were classified into one of six types. There were three high violence types (horror, action/ adventure, science-fiction) and three mild violence types (romance and comedy, teen, and dramatic). Exposure to each type equalled the sum of the motion pictures of that type the respondent reported seeing during the previous two months.

Exposure to each of four types of books--one high violence type (which included all horror, adventure, science-fiction, detective, or western novels) and three mild violence types (romance novels, best selling novels, and non-fiction books)--equalled the sum of all books of that type that a respondent reported reading during the previous two months.[30]

A slightly modified version of the measure of perceived violence in society employed by Gerbner et al. and Hawkins and Pingree was used.[31] Each respondent's measure of perceived violence in society was the total of that respondent's responses

to the four questions about perceived violence in society.[32] For each question, one represented the score closest to the statistical reality of violence in society and five represented the score closest to the version of reality presented on television, as defined by Gerbner et al.'s content analyses of network television.[33] The minimum perceived violence score was four and the maximum was 20.

Since only 58.7 percent of the respondents had access to MTV through cable television, the measurement of exposure to MTV produced positively skewed and, thus, non-normal frequency distributions.[34] As Norusis notes, the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient should be used with "interval data that do not satisfy the normality assumption" instead of the more common Pearson product-moment correlation.[35] Thus, Spearman's rank correlation coefficients were used to measure the relationships between MTV viewing and exposure to other forms of mediated violence. Since no assumptions were made about the directions of these relationships, statistical significance was evaluated using two-tailed significance tests.[36]

Results

The correlations between MTV viewing and the viewing of other forms of mediated violence are reported in Table 1. Ten of the correlations were statistically significant ($p<.05$).

----------Table 1 About Here----------

In a strong inverse pattern, MTV viewing would be negatively and significantly related to high violence television programs, motion pictures and books, but would be positively and

significantly related to mild violence television programs motion pictures and books. For the seventh graders, three of these six relationships were found. MTV viewing was negatively and significantly related to the viewing of high violence television programs and the reading of high violence books, and it was positively and significantly related to the viewing of mild violence motion pictures, including both romance and comedy films and teen films. However, MTV viewing was also negatively and significantly related to one type of mild violence television program, non-serial drama.

For the juniors, the pattern of relationships between MTV and types of media high in violence also tended to be inverse. Consistent with the inverse pattern, MTV viewing was negatively and significantly related to viewing of high violence televised action/crime shows, and positively and significantly related to less violent daytime soaps, mild violence books and romance novels. However, MTV viewing was also positively and significantly related to high violence motion pictures.

The Spearman's rank correlation coefficients between MTV viewing and perceived violence in society were positive (i.e. higher MTV viewing was related to beliefs of higher levels of violence), but weak, $r_S = .108$ (N=116) for the seventh graders and $r_S = .086$ (N=107) for the juniors. Neither was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Discussion

The documented high levels of violence in MTV's music videos have generated concern among both critics and researchers. The

findings of this study are significant in light of Lippmann, Schramm, and Becker, who argue for the importance of an individual's total media profile in assessing the impact of a particular kind of mass media content. They imply that a centripetal pattern of positive relationships among media containing similar kinds of content should produce stronger media effects than an inverse pattern in which that content is received from only one source. Thus, the high levels of violence reported in content analyses of MTV should be of special concern if MTV is positively related to other sources of mediated violence (the centripetal pattern).

If these scholars are correct, the findings of this study indicate that concern about the high levels of violence in music videos may be exaggerated. This study shows a clear trend for MTV viewing to be negatively related to exposure to other types of violent content in television, motion pictures, and books. Of the 13 significant correlations reported for the two age groups, 11 are consistent with the inverse pattern (negative relationships to high violence media content and positive relationships to mild violence media content) and only two are consistent with the centripetal pattern (positive relationships to high violence media content and negative relationships to mild violence media content). In addition, for both age groups, MTV viewing is negatively related to televised action/crime programs, certainly the most frequently used form of mediated violence. In general, those seventh graders and high school juniors who were above average in MTV viewing, tended to be below average in the

viewing of other types of violent content. This trend was especially strong for seventh graders, the younger, and presumably more impressionable, of the two age groups.

This tendency toward an inverse pattern of relationships suggests that researchers examining MTV viewing are likely to find few effects related to mediated violence. Such a conclusion was reinforced by the analysis of the relationship between MTV viewing and one such effect, perceived violence in society. For both age groups, the positive relationships between MTV viewing and perceived violence in society were weak and non-significant. Although content analyses have shown that violence on MTV is common, the results of this study suggest that this violence may not be consequential.

Notes

1 National Coalition on Television Violence, "Rock Music and MTV Found Increasingly Violent," (Champaign, Il.: Press Release, January 14, 1984).

2 Pam Brandt, "MTV Music Television: The Beat Goes On. . .for Better, for Worse," Ms., November 1983, pp. 42, 44-45.

3 Richard E. Caplan, "Violent Program Content in Music Video," Journalism Quarterly, 62 (1985), p. 146.

4 Richard L. Baxter, Cynthia DeRiemer, Ann Landini, Larry Leslie, and Michael W. Singletary, "A Content Analysis of Music Videos," Journal of Broadcasting, 29 (1985), p. 333.

5 Barry L. Sherman and Joesph R. Dominick, "Violence and Sex in Music Videos: TV and Rock 'n' Roll," Journal of Communication, 36, No. 1 (1986), p. 86.

6 Jane D. Brown and Kenneth Campbell, "Race and Gender in Music Videos: The Same Beat but a Different Drummer," Journal of Communication, 36, No. 1 (1986), p. 103.

7 Melvin L. De Fleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, Theories of Mass Communication, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 1982).

8 George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "Living with Television: The Violence Profile," Journal of Communication, 26, No. 2 (1976), 173-199.

9 Baxter, DeRiemer, Landini, Leslie, and Singletary, op. cit.

10 Sherman and Dominick, op. cit., p. 80.

11 National Institute of Mental Health, Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties, DHHS Publication No. ADM 82-1195 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982).

12 Brown and Campbell, op. cit., p. 96

13 Se-Wen Sun and James Lull, "The Adolescent Audience for Music Videos and Why They Watch," Journal of Communication, 36, No. 1 (1986), 115-125.

14 Rebecca B. Rubin, Alan M. Rubin, Elizabeth M. Perse, Cameron Armstrong, Michael McHugh, and Noreen Faix, "Media Use and Meaning of Music Video," Journalism Quarterly, 63 (1986), 353-359.

15 "MTV's Message," Newsweek, November 1985, p. 55.

16

See Bradley S. Greenberg, Nadyne Edison, Felipe Korzenny, Carlos Fernandez-Collado, and Charles K. Atkin, "Antisocial and Prosocial Behaviors on Television," in Life on Television: Content Analyses of U.S. TV Drama, ed. Bradley S. Greenberg (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing, 1980) and George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael F. Eleey, Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, Suzanne Jeffries-Fox, and Nancy Signorielli, Violence Profile No. 8: Trends in Network Television Drama and Viewer Conceptions of Social Reality: 1967-1976 (Philadelphia: Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, 1977).

17

Greenberg, Edison, Korzenny, Fernandez-Collado, and Atkin, op. cit., p. 118.

18

Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (New York: MacMillan, Co., 1921). pp. 3-32.

19

Wilbur Schramm, "Procedures and Effects of Mass Communication," in Mass Media and Education II: 53rd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, ed. N. B. Henry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954). p. 125.

20

Samuel L. Becker, "Visual Stimuli and the Construction of Meaning," in Visual Learning, Thinking, and Communication eds. Bikkar S. Randhawa and William E. Coffman (New York: Academic Press, 1978). p 44.

21

Richard R. Martin, John T. McNelly, and Fausto Izcaray, "Is Media Exposure Unidimensional?: A Socioeconomic Approach," Journalism Quarterly, 53 (1976), 619-625.

22

Research by Gerbner and Gross, op. cit. first demonstrated a positive relationship between exposure to television and the perception of the amount of violence in society. This relationship was found to remain even after possible intervening variables were held constant in the analysis. Hawkins, and Pingree have shown that an even stronger relationship exists when exposure to violent (crime/adventure) television content or cartoon television content is considered separately. (See Robert P. Hawkins and Suzanne Pingree, "Some Processes in the Cultivation Effect," Communication Research, 7 (1980), 193-226.

23

See (DELETED TO PRESERVE THE ANONYMITY OF THE AUTHOR(S).)

24

Sun and Lull, op. cit., p. 117.

25

Two groups of respondents (seventh graders and high school juniors) were surveyed to allow the comparison of older children and adolescents. Seventh graders were of particular interest because they are younger and presumably more impressionable, and because they are near the age of peak television exposure in the United States. (See Bradley S. Greenberg, "Gratifications of

Television Viewing and Their Correlates for British Children," in The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research, eds. Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz (Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1974). p. 87.)

High school juniors were selected because of their strong interest in popular music, including MTV, and because they have incorporated a series of changes that begin with the onset of adolescence. Typically, juniors have developed social interests outside the home, including dating and other peer activities, which decrease the amount of time spent with television. Many juniors have access to an automobile and thus find it easier to attend motion pictures, and interest in popular music is usually at its peek. Because of these changes, high school juniors were chosen to provide a strong contrast to the seventh graders.

26 Eight of the public school juniors completed only 5 daily diaries. In order to save this data, estimates of their exposure to the various types of television programming were constructed by multiplying their five day totals by 1.4.

27 Five of these respondents were seniors taking a junior level English class.

28 The Waterloo and Cedar Falls, Iowa cable systems began carrying MTV as part of their basic cable service on August 1, 1981. Thus, at the time of the survey, MTV had been available to all cable subscribers for over 14 months.

29 Hawkins and Pingree, op. cit., p. 205.

30 Television programs, motion pictures, and books that were not coded into one of the types described here were coded as "other" and were not included in the data analysis.

31 Gerbner, Gross, Eleey, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, and Signorielli, op. cit. and Hawkins and Pingree, op. cit.

32 The four questions were:

1. During any given week, what are your chances of being involved in some kind of violence (hostile physical contact with another person)?

(1) About one in 10 (statistical reality)
(2) About one in 25
(3) About one in 50
(4) About one in 75
(5) About one in 100 (television reality)

2. What percent of all crimes involve violence, like murders, rapes, robbery, and assault?

(1) About 15 percent (statistical reality)
(2) About 18 percent
(3) About 20 percent
(4) About 22 percent
(5) About 25 percent (television reality)

3. Are most murders committed by strangers, or by relatives or acquaintances of the victim?

(1) Strangers (statistical reality)
(2) Relatives or Acquaintances (television reality)

4. What percent of all American men who have jobs are police officers or detectives?

(1) About 1 Percent (statistical reality)
(2) About 2 Percent
(3) About 3 Percent
(4) About 4 Percent
(5) About 5 Percent (television reality)

33

For the seventh graders, there was one missing response to question one, and there were two missing responses to question two, five missing responses to question three, and three missing responses to question four. For the juniors, there was one missing response to question one, and there were two missing responses to question two, three missing responses to question three, and three missing responses to question four. Missing responses to a particular question were replaced with the mean response to that question made by the respondents from the appropriate age group.

34

For the seventh graders, 81.9 percent of the respondents reported no MTV viewing for the survey week, 10.3 percent reported viewing between one half hour and three hours, 1.8 percent reported viewing between three and one half and six hours, and 6.3 percent reported viewing more than six hours. For the juniors, 80.4 percent of the respondents reported no MTV viewing for the survey week, 13.1 percent reported viewing between one half hour and three hours, 3.6 percent reported viewing between three and one half and six hours, and 2.7 percent reported viewing more than six hours.

35

Marija J. Norusis, Introductory Statistics Guide: SPSSX (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, Co., 1983). p. 130.

36

User's Guide SPSSX (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, Co., 1983). p. 665.

TABLE 1

MTV Viewing and Exposure to Violent Media Content

Media Variables	7th Graders(N=116) r S	Juniors(N=107) r S
Television		
High Violence	-.301(a)	-.117
Action/Crime	-.297(a)	-.213(b)
Cartoons	-.223(b)	.010
Mild Violence	-.153	-.024
Non-Serial Drama	-.218(b)	.015
Daytime Soaps	.060	.205(b)
Prime Time Soaps	-.080	-.064
Situation Comedy	-.117	-.029
Sports	-.028	-.107
Game Shows	-.135	-.092
Movies	.060	.038
News	-.120	-.109
Motion Pictures		
High Violence	-.064	.195(b)
Horror	.098	.066
Action/Crime	-.094	.161
Science-Fiction	-.081	.163
Mild Violence	.239(a)	.160
Romance & Comedy	.210(b)	.156
Teen	.240(a)	.162
Dramatic	-.109	.037
Books		
High Violence	-.235(b)	-.003
Mild Violence	.132	.241(b)
Romance Novels	.125	.264(a)
Best Sellers	.030	.173
Non-Fiction	.088	-.182

(a) Correlation significant at $p<.01$.
(b) Correlation significant at $p<.05$.